

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. ALAN GRAYSON

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, December 15, 2009

Mr. GRAYSON. Madam Speaker, on rollcall Nos. 969 and 970, I would have voted "yes." I was absent because I joined a congressional delegation inspecting military facilities in Iraq, which did not return until the following morning. Hence, had I been present, I would have voted "yea."

EXTENDING ANDEAN TRADE PREFERENCES

HON. DAVID DREIER

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, December 15, 2009

Mr. DREIER. Madam Speaker, I am a strong and long-time supporter of the Andean Trade Preferences Act, ATPA, and I support extending this vital program. Fostering economic development and the rule of law in the Andean region is essential to our national security, foreign policy and economic interests. H.R. 4284 extends ATPA benefits for Colombia, Peru, and Ecuador until December 31, 2010.

I believe there are two essential components to making ATPA work as effectively as possible. First, there must be continuity, so that American businesses and workers can get the greatest benefit. The U.S. jobs that are supported by engaging in the Andean region through ATPA require a sound investment environment, which in turn demands certainty that the program will be maintained. Taking action to extend ATPA for an additional year beyond December 31, 2009, is a positive step. However, demonstrating a stronger commitment to continuity by extending the program for at least 2 years would improve the program's effectiveness and provide greater opportunity for job creation here in the U.S.

Second, there must be accountability. While two of the three current participant countries—Colombia and Peru—have made enormous strides in implementing economic reforms, solidifying the rule of law and engaging as strong partners with the U.S., Ecuador has moved backwards in many regards. Most troubling has been the failure to strengthen the rule of law, as this is the bedrock upon which all economic and political reforms are built. While I believe that engagement through trade is the best way to encourage progress, we must take steps to ensure that there is accountability along the way. Unfortunately, H.R. 4284 removes measures currently in place to conduct a special review of Ecuador's progress. This action diminishes the incentives for Ecuador to play by the rules. It also sends the message to our partners that those who take steps backwards will get the same treatment as those who make enormous forward progress. This lack of accountability diminishes the effectiveness of both the carrot and the stick.

As we consider long-term proposals for our trade preferences programs, including ATPA, I believe that we must ensure there is both greater continuity and greater accountability. Continued failure to do so will only limit our

ability to achieve the national security, foreign policy and economic objectives these programs are designed to achieve.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. JIM JORDAN

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, December 15, 2009

Mr. JORDAN of Ohio. Madam Speaker, due to weather-related flight cancellations that delayed my return to Washington until this morning, I was absent from the House Floor during Monday's two rollcall votes. Had I been present, I would have voted in favor of H. Res. 779 and H. Res. 942.

CALLING ON THE IRAQI GOVERNMENT TO KEEP ITS PROMISE AND UPHOLD ITS OBLIGATIONS UNDER INTERNATIONAL LAW

HON. LINCOLN DIAZ-BALART

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, December 15, 2009

Mr. LINCOLN DIAZ-BALART of Florida. Madam Speaker, I rise today to urge the Iraqi authorities not to forcibly remove Camp Ashraf residents from the home where they have lived for over twenty years. International human rights groups such as Amnesty International have warned that forcibly relocating the Camp Ashraf residents will put the Iranian opposition group "at risk of arbitrary arrest, torture or other forms of ill-treatment, and unlawful killing."

On July 29 of this year, I spoke out against the brutal attack that began on July 28 carried out by Iraqi security forces who were acting at the behest of the Iranian regime. The Iraqi security forces rolled over unarmed Camp Ashraf residents with tanks and beat them with sticks, killing at least nine residents and injuring many more. An injustice of this magnitude must not happen again.

If the Iraqi government forcibly moves these residents from their Camp Ashraf home, it will be breaking its promise to the United States and violating its obligations under international law. When these Iranian exiles voluntarily surrendered their weapons to U.S. forces in 2003, they did so in exchange for a promise that the U.S. would protect them. When the United States withdrew from the Camp Ashraf region, the United States and Iraq signed an agreement that the Iraqi government would continue to ensure their safety. Furthermore, Camp Ashraf residents are also shielded by international law because they are "protected persons" under Article 27 of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

This attempt to move the Camp Ashraf residents to a remote prison in the middle of the deserts appears to be an ugly attempt by the Iraqi government to appease the Iranian regime. Groups such as Amnesty International warn that it may even lead to their forcible return to Iran. If returned to Iran, these members of the Iranian opposition would face almost certain torture and even death.

Madam Speaker, I call on the Iraqi government to keep its promise to the United States

and uphold its obligations under international law. Attempting to mollify the tyrannical, illegitimate Iranian regime at the expense of these pro-democracy activists would be a tragic mistake. I call on the Iraqi government to ensure the protection that these exiles were promised and to which they are entitled under international law.

HONORING SONOMA VALLEY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE OF SONOMA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

HON. MIKE THOMPSON

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, December 15, 2009

Mr. THOMPSON of California. Madam Speaker, I rise today with my colleague, Representative LYNN WOOLSEY, to honor the 100th anniversary of the Sonoma Valley Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber has long served as a spirited defender of the Valley's interests, by encouraging new industry, organizing beautification projects and managing flood control efforts.

The Chamber began the evening of April 10, 1909, when 32 businessmen convened over dinner to discuss how they could stimulate commerce for the benefit of local merchants and professionals.

Membership quickly grew to 100 and the Chamber began their first initiatives, like publishing marketing material and establishing committees to begin tackling an ambitious agenda. In the early years, the Chamber called for transportation improvements and successfully lobbied Congress to protect a local federal facility from closure.

During the Great Depression, the Sonoma Valley Chamber of Commerce was instrumental in addressing needs of a paralyzed business community. To generate renewed interest in the organization, the Chamber hosted an event benefiting street and driveway improvements.

In the subsequent years, the Chamber pioneered many efforts, including the creation of a commuter bus service to San Francisco, the endorsement of a municipal water system, support for State Parks and advocacy for underground utility and telephone lines. Notably, the Chamber raised local matching funds for a job stimulus program that was part of President Roosevelt's New Deal.

Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Chamber was designated as a farm labor office tasked with steering workers to local farmers. In the years following the war, the Chamber focused on supporting an adequate sewage system, the introduction of local hospital and the adoption of a zoning plan. By mid-century, the Chamber hosted an industrial conference, boldly escalating efforts to bring new industry to the Valley.

Today the Chamber has expanded its membership to more than 700 leaders who continue to help ensure a thriving economy through advocacy, promotion, networking, education and services.

Operating under the mantra that "Strong businesses make strong communities," the Chamber hosts events, publishes a business magazine and offers comprehensive business, community and visitor resources. The Chamber also leads recognition efforts, honoring the business of the year and green businesses.